



TO CELEBRATE A LIFE

**A Caring and Dignified
Funeral Ceremony for Those
who Choose to Live without
Religion.**



THE DEATH OF SOMEONE CLOSE TO YOU

The death of a parent, partner, or other close relative or friend is often a new and bitter experience for each of us. We know that time can eventually soothe our grief, but the immediate feeling of shock and loss is very real.

The funeral should be a time when family and friends can openly express and share their sadness, as it will probably be the last opportunity for everyone together to focus their thoughts on the person who has died. The ceremony must try to capture the essence of his or her personality so that it will be remembered as an occasion which uniquely and affectionately honoured the life that has ended.

The Funeral Director will deal with all the practical arrangements, but it is up to you to indicate what kind of funeral ceremony you would like.



WHO MIGHT PREFER A NON-RELIGIOUS FUNERAL?

Regular church-goers and others committed to a religious faith will probably wish to turn to their minister or religious leader. There are more and more people, though, for whom religion is of less significance, or who have made a clear decision to live their lives without it.

For them, a religious service conducted by a clergyman can lack sincerity and bring little consolation. It may not seem to be the right way to say a final farewell, if the one who has died did not accept the religious view of life and death. In this case a Humanist non-religious ceremony will probably have more warmth and meaning for everyone.

It can also be an acceptable way to bring together members of a family who differ in their religious allegiance.



WHO ARE HUMANISTS?

Humanists care deeply about moral issues, but from a non-religious viewpoint. Humanism continues a tradition which has existed for over 2,500 years and which flourishes today in many countries.

We believe strongly in the good within human beings, and the individual's right to freedom of choice in the main decisions of life and death. All people are equal regardless of sex, culture, age or race, and we must find solutions for problems from within ourselves rather than rely on any supernatural intervention.

The British Humanist Association has organised a national network to provide experienced men and women who understand the tragedy of bereavement and who will create with you a personal, caring and dignified funeral ceremony. On the day, they can officiate (conduct the ceremony) at the crematorium or cemetery on your behalf.



WHAT SORT OF PEOPLE BECOME OFFICIANTS?

Humanist Officiants come from a variety of backgrounds and tend to be men and women who can empathise — often from personal experience — with those experiencing the changing fortunes of life. This, and their training, enables them to be sensitive to the distress and vulnerability of a bereaved family. Whatever the circumstances of the life and death, they will never question or condemn.



THE CEREMONY

Once you have arranged to have a non-religious Humanist ceremony, your Officiant will wish to speak with you, and ideally meet you and possibly others closely affected by the death.

Although the ceremony is usually quite simple, each is different and highly personal, so it is

helpful for the Officiant to get to know as much as possible about the person who has died.

Most important is the tribute or the account of the person's life. This can either be written by a member of the family or by the Officiant after he or she has learned the details from you.

Members of the family or friends may wish to participate by reading a passage or a poem, or they may like to contribute their own reminiscences, all of which can make the occasion more moving and special. After all, the ceremony is normally just as much a celebration of the life that has ended as it is a time to bring consolation to those who live on.



MUSIC

Music can speak direct to the emotions and is often a very poignant way to reflect the personality of the one who has died. Although an organist is normally available, most crematoria have good facilities for playing cassette tapes, which gives you complete freedom of choice. You can provide your own recordings of anything from classical to modern popular music.



WHAT MIGHT OTHERS THINK?

The kind of ceremony you choose must first of all be right and appropriate for the person who has died and for the close family. However, there may well be those present who are from various faiths and denominations, for whom a non-religious funeral will still be something new. The Officiant will always discuss the content with you. A Humanist ceremony will normally incorporate a short period of silent meditation which gives an opportunity for private prayer.

Every Officiant is always careful not to offend anyone, and people often say afterwards how moving, sincere and fitting they found the ceremony. For the immediate family and close friends it will be a great comfort to have provided a ceremony such as the person who has died would have wanted.

SOME PRACTICAL POINTS

- 1 The British Humanist Association (BHA) has set up a national network of Officiants based on regional Contacts and a National Co-ordinator. It publishes a booklet of practical guidelines for arranging a non-religious funeral ceremony (see over).
- 2 Please inform the Funeral Director as soon as you can that you would prefer a non-religious Humanist ceremony. This leaflet gives the name and address of your local Contact, as well as other relevant BHA telephone numbers.
- 3 If at all possible, you or the Funeral Director should get in touch with the Humanist Contact before the date and time of the funeral are arranged, in order to ensure that a time is agreed which suits everyone.
- 4 A non-religious ceremony is perfectly legal and is completely acceptable to Funeral Directors and public crematoria and cemeteries, who are anxious to help you and your family have what you want.
- 5 The Officiant normally receives a fee broadly in line with what a minister receives. This is arranged by the Funeral Director, who handles the payment.
- 6 If you are making this decision for yourself for some time in the future, it is necessary that those likely to be responsible for arranging the funeral know your wishes. It is not enough to mention the matter in your will, which might not be read until after the funeral has taken place.



Your local Humanist Contact:

Alternatively, please ring the BHA National
Co-ordinator for funeral ceremonies —

0608 652063



The BHA publishes a comprehensive booklet for
anyone thinking of arranging a non-religious
funeral called FUNERALS WITHOUT GOD. It
contains practical guidelines, several sample
ceremonies, and a selection of suitable prose and
verse. It costs £4.50, plus 50p postage, and is
available from:

BRITISH HUMANIST ASSOCIATION

47 Theobald's Road
London WC1X 8SP

Tel: 0171 430 0908

Fax: 0171 430 1271

The BHA is a Registered Charity, No. 285987

